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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

## **Regional Maritime Conference in the Asia/Pacific Region**

**Report I**

Singapore, 2002



INTERNATIONAL LABOUR OFFICE GENEVA

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INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Report I

**Report on an ILO investigation into the  
living and working conditions of  
seafarers in the Asia/Pacific region**

**Report for discussion at the  
Regional Maritime Conference in the Asia/Pacific Region**

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## **Acknowledgements**

This report is based upon an analysis of the replies to an ILO questionnaire on the living and working conditions of seafarers, prepared by Dr. Heather Leggate and Professor James McConville of the Centre for International Transport Management at the London Guildhall University. However, the ILO is solely responsible for this report in its present final form.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent decades the balance of world economic activity has shifted in favour of developing countries, specifically those in the Asia/Pacific region. The continuing long-term expansion in international seaborne trade has been significant in this process. In a recent report <sup>1</sup> the growth of export and import volumes reached by countries in East Asia (Japan, Republic of Korea, China, (Taiwan, China), and the major ASEAN countries) reached double figures, emphatically confirming the recovery from the financial crisis of 1997. The total fleet, that is domestic register and beneficially owned, in open registers reached 298.9 million dwt at the end of 2000 (37 per cent of the world fleet). It comprised a considerable proportion of new tonnage as illustrated by the average age of 12.2 years, being substantially lower than the world average of 13.9 years.

Another factor in the growth of the region has been China's "open door" policy and the introduction of an increasingly market-orientated economy. With this greater liberalization, foreign shipping companies have been able to establish independent enterprises in China to engage in normal business activities for their own vessels or joint ventures through bilateral agreements. <sup>2</sup> Volumes of trade have continued to grow together with the capacity for handling such volume. For example in 2000, China's container box throughput of ports rose by 37 per cent to 22.68 TEU, 20.5 million handled at sea ports and 2.1 million at river ports. International traffic reached 360 million tonnes of which 330 million were moved through main coastal ports.

The region owns and operates a substantial fleet and is without a doubt the largest provider of seafaring labour. In the latest international manpower survey it was shown that the top ten labour-supplying countries provided 56 per cent of all seafarers in 2000 (the total supply being 1,227,000). Of this 56 per cent, some 87 per cent came from the Far East, the Indian subcontinent and Eastern Europe. By far the largest supplier is the Philippines which represents some 19 per cent of the total. <sup>3</sup>

The success of operation on board ship depends on a well-qualified, efficient labour force which, of necessity, requires decent standards of living and working conditions. This study focuses on this particular area by analysing the results of an international survey and case studies on the Philippines, India, and China which serve to highlight issues specific to the Asia/Pacific region.

<sup>1</sup> UNCTAD: *Review of maritime transport*, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Guangqi Sun and Shiping Zhang: "General review of the Chinese shipping policy for the contemporary era", in *Maritime Policy and Management*, 26(1) pp.93-99.

<sup>3</sup> BIMCO/ISF: *Manpower update 2000*.

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## 2. Analysis of the survey

The source and core empirical evidence of this research originates from an ILO-designed questionnaire<sup>4</sup> distributed to government departments, shipowners' associations and unions worldwide during 2001. Responses were obtained from 73 institutions representing 60 different States. This formed the foundation for the main report on living and working conditions of seafarers.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, the utilization of such a method of study means much of the evidence is of a descriptive and/or a qualitative kind.

The survey was constructed within a comparatively basic explanatory framework. This concentrated on three main areas reflecting the structure of the questionnaire, only two of which are relevant to the present analysis. Firstly, general questions concerned with inspection of living and working conditions; restrictions on the use of foreign seafarers; legislation; and collective agreements for nationals and non-nationals. Secondly, employment conditions within flag States with questions focused on recruitment issues, minimum age, wages, health and social security. The following analysis is confined to ten Asia/Pacific countries (see Appendix 1) which completed the questionnaire and compares the results to the rest of the sample of 50 countries.

### 2.1. Inspection

The first set of questions deals with the issue of inspection, more specifically who takes responsibility for the inspection process. The responses from the Asia/Pacific countries show government involvement in all cases, with the unions playing some part in Pakistan and Papua New Guinea. The port authorities share responsibility with the Government in Singapore and the Republic of Korea.

Table 1. Inspection

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Government responsibility	100	96
Specific training to inspectors	40	48
Can complaint lead to inspection	50	66
Sanction on shipowners	90	84

An indicator of the importance given to inspection of living and working conditions is the extent of specific training given to inspectors. Across the whole survey the percentage of countries providing such training was low, with the Asia/Pacific region less favourable than the rest at 40 per cent. Complaints by the seafarers which could lead to an inspection were also less likely among the Asia/Pacific countries at 50 per cent compared to 66 per cent for the rest of the sample. As far as sanctions on shipowners are concerned, the region is more rigorous at imposing penalties for non-compliance with regulations relating to living and working conditions. Sanctions, which usually take the form of fines and detention, are imposed in 90 per cent of cases.

<sup>4</sup> The authors of this report were not involved in the design of the questionnaire and, due to the extensive nature of the survey, cannot confirm the validity of responses produced.

<sup>5</sup> Leggate, H.K.; McConville J.: "Investigation into the living and working conditions of seafarers", ILO, May 2002.

## 2.2. Legislation

The seafaring labour force is a genuinely international one with seafarers originating from a multiplicity of countries. It was therefore interesting to discover that the majority of States operate some kind of restrictive policy on the employment of foreign seafarers, particularly regarding the master and senior officer positions. The Asia/Pacific countries were however less discriminatory than the rest of the sample, with 40 per cent imposing no restriction at all. India and Pakistan had a requirement for an all-national crew and there was a preference for own nationals in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. The stipulation for nationals as officers and senior officers was not as prevalent in the Asia/Pacific region as in other flag States (see table 2).

Table 2. Foreign seafarer restriction

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
None	40	34
All nationals	20	6
All nationals except where authorized	20	12
Officers or senior officers nationals	10	30
Other	10	4
Not given	0	14

The questions relating to national legislation produced a more positive response from the Asia/Pacific registers (see table 3). Some 60 per cent had national legislation covering seafarers either in whole or in part compared to 54 per cent for the other registers. Furthermore, specific legislation covering seafarers was in place in 50 per cent of Asia/Pacific countries compared to 40 per cent of other States. An area of difficulty identified across the sample was that of protecting seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels and this was highlighted in the analysis for the Asia/Pacific region. Although the 20 per cent response was higher than in other flag States, the problem is still apparent. The onus is therefore on the flag States to provide the necessary protection to foreign seafarers employed on their vessels. Such legislation covering non-nationals working on a register was not in place in the majority of cases, as shown in table 3. However, it should be noted that India and Pakistan employ only nationals and thus such legislation is not applicable.

Table 3. Legislation

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Does national legislation cover seafarers?	60	54
Is there specific seafarers' legislation?	50	40
Does national legislation cover seafarers on foreign flags?	20	10
Does legislation cover non-nationals on the register?	30	62

Collective bargaining is an important element of the process of determining living and working conditions. Such agreements were common practice across the whole sample and comparable in the Asia/Pacific countries. Individual contracts, however, were less prevalent in the region with only 40 per cent confirming their existence (see table 4).

Table 4. Collective bargaining

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Collective agreements	70	72
Individual contracts	40	66

### 2.3. Conditions of employment

Conditions of employment cover a wide range of topics, some of which are not included in the present work. The reasons for this is the complexity of the subject and the range of interpretation elicited from respondents which in some cases created considerable confusion. In particular, questions relating to maximum hours of work and minimum hours of rest, evoked responses of normal hours and hours inclusive of overtime. Such diversity does not allow for any meaningful comparison. Similarly with annual leave, some responses were clearly quoting the statutory annual holiday and others the total time ashore, which again made standardization impossible. An attempt to rectify this position by some form of conjecture was rejected. The analysis of conditions of employment is therefore concentrated on wages, regulation of working hours and repatriation as shown in table 5.

Table 5. Conditions of employment

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Statutory minimum wage	60	50
Differences in wages between nationals and non-nationals	30	12
Hours regulated by law	70	80
Repatriation by employer	40	68

As can be seen, the Asia/Pacific registers have a higher incidence of statutory minimum wage than the rest of the sample, but also more cases where there are differences between the wages of nationals and non-nationals. Working hours are generally regulated by law with a 70 per cent positive response. The area of concern however, is that of repatriation of seafarers which is normally the responsibility of the employer. Of the Asia/Pacific region responses, only four stated that this was the case.

### 2.4. Recruitment

One of the most useful indicators of an industry's potential is its attitude towards recruitment. The main factors affecting recruitment are the long-term management policies adopted by shipowners and the way in which employment opportunities and career prospects are perceived by the prospective new entrants. The questionnaire here examines three main areas in relation to recruitment, which are allied to the international conventions, namely the minimum age for going to sea, non-national membership of trade unions and regulation of the recruitment process. The outcomes can be seen in table 6.

**Table 6. Recruitment issues**

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Minimum age under 16	30	16
Can non-nationals be members of trade unions?	30	56
Is recruitment regulated by law?	60	68

The minimum age for going to sea varied widely from 14 to 19 years. The distribution was however skewed to the younger age in the case of the Asia/Pacific region, with two countries (Pakistan and Malaysia) adopting a minimum of 14 years. The percentage under 16 is therefore higher for the region than for the rest of the sample. However, the most common response was 16 years.

The membership of trade unions by non-nationals was partly a reflection of the restrictions on foreign seafarers. Although only 30 per cent of the region answered positively it must be remembered that India and Pakistan restrict employment to own nationals. It was interesting to note, however, that there were two countries with no trade unions, namely Vanuatu and Malaysia.

The area of recruitment was regulated in most respondent countries, with 60 per cent of Asia/Pacific countries compared to 68 per cent in the rest of the sample. The importance of manning agencies in the process is addressed in section 3.1 of this paper.

## 2.5. Health, welfare and social security

Health and welfare issues were covered by the existence of laws and regulations to cover food, accommodation and sea, accident prevention and welfare. On food and accommodation, the Asia/Pacific region surpasses that of the rest of the sample but has some omissions on accident prevention and welfare (see table 7).

**Table 7. Laws relating to health and welfare**

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Food	70	64
Accommodation	70	64
Accident prevention	50	56
Welfare	40	50

The lack of social security provision for seafarers in the region is a disturbing statistic. Only 40 per cent of respondents had a system which covered seafarers compared to 80 per cent in the rest of the world. However what should be pointed out is that two countries had a separate system of social security for seafaring labour (see table 8).

**Table 8. Social security**

	Asia/Pacific region (%)	Others (%)
Covers seafarers	40	80
Separate system	20	12

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From the sample of Asia/Pacific countries, some interesting trends emerge. The region is comparable with other flag States in terms of inspection, collective bargaining agreements, regulation of working hours and recruitment. It fares significantly better on the incidence of statutory minimum wage, sanctions on shipowners for non-compliance with standards of living and working conditions, and specific seafarer legislation. The areas of concern, however, are lower minimum age for going to sea, wage differentials between nationals and non-nationals, social security provision and repatriation responsibility.

### 3. Labour issues for the Asia/Pacific region

During recent decades, changes in economic and commercial activities have been fundamental in the restructuring of the international seafaring labour force.<sup>6</sup> This has been combined with changes in the structure of seafarer employment. Basically, there has been a relentless decline in the number of seafarers coming from developed countries, due to an appreciable reduction in recruitment and retention. Thus the age structure of this group has become progressively older and created a situation of negative growth. The lack of suitable seafarers from developed countries, coupled with a desire to reduce labour unit costs, has created an increasing demand for seafarers from developing countries. Initially the vast majority of these seafarers from these countries were ratings, but there is now a growing supply of officers both for deck and engine room. It is also seen in a positive light by developing countries. As a Bangladeshi expert pointed out: “Maritime employment is of consequence to developing countries in a number of ways. Most important of all, it is a source of employment to the able-bodied men of the developing world. Those developing countries in Asia have achieved economic growth. Such growth has been eaten away by uncontrolled population growth, so the non-oil-producing countries face major problems of unemployment and underemployment and the useful outlet created by developed countries to get into shipping activities must be utilized by the developing countries.”<sup>7</sup>

A recent report by the International Commission on Shipping<sup>8</sup> listed the top seven labour-supplying countries as follows:

Table 9. Top seven labour-supplying countries (2000)

Country	Officers	Ratings	Total in 2000	Total in 1995
Philippines	50 000	180 000	230 000	244 782
Indonesia	15 500	68 000	83 500	83 500
Turkey	14 303	48 144	62 447	80 000
China	34 197	47 820	82 017	76 482
India	11 700	43 000	54 700	53 000
Russian Federation	21 680	34 000	55 680	47 688
Japan	18 813	12 200	31 013	42 537

Source: BIMCO/ISF: *Manpower update 2000* and Couper et al., 1999.

The top seven labour-supplying countries provided some 50 per cent of all seafarers in 2000 (the total supply being 1,227,000). Of this 50 per cent, some 80 per cent came from the Far East, the Indian subcontinent and Eastern Europe. As can be seen, there is a slight contraction in the total numbers and some minor redistribution between 1995 and 2000. The primary and obvious point to make is that Filipino seafarers represent some 19 per cent, by far the largest source of supply. China has marginally and perhaps indicatively increased while all the developed countries listed show some contraction.

<sup>6</sup> For an earlier discussion of this issue, see Mary Brooks (1989), ed.: *Seafaring in the Asian region*, Asian Economic Research Unit, Institute of South-East Asia Studies, in collaboration with the Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalong Korn University and the Ocean Institute of Canada, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Hafnat, A.: “Seafarers in the Asian region” (Bangladesh), in *Seafaring welfare in the Asian region*, Report on the regional seminar, Singapore, Feb. 1990, ILO, Geneva.

<sup>8</sup> International Commission on Shipping: *Inquiry into safety: “Ships slaves and competition”*, 2000.

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Published information from other sources indicates that the figure recording the number of Filipino seafarers represents a serious underestimation. Those compiled by the Philippines Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) suggest that the number of Filipino seafarers deployed has in fact increased by almost 20 per cent over the last five years. The number of registered seafarers in 1999 was 472,225, representing an accumulation of new entrants since registration began in 1988. Neither of these figures reflect the number of active seafarers but, given that new entrants since 1996 have totaled nearly 170,000, it is likely that the total is substantially higher than the 230,000 indicated in table 9. Despite this prominent position, there is an increasing awareness among Filipino authorities of the threat of international competition from other labour-supplying countries, in particular China and Eastern Europe. This issue is covered in more detail in section 3.3.

### 3.1. Manning agencies

The role of manning agencies in the recruitment process is significant, emphasizing the requirement for adequate regulation. The ILO Recruitment and Placement of Seafarers Convention, 1996 (No. 179), makes explicit the fact that private recruitment services should be regulated. Further, an undue proliferation of such private services should not be encouraged. Laws or regulations should be established to ensure that no fees or other charges for recruitment are borne directly or indirectly in whole or in part by the seafarers. Recruitment agencies should be closely supervised and prohibited from using means, mechanisms or lists intended to prevent or deter seafarers from gaining employment.

In the case study on the Philippines, it has been estimated that there are about 300 manning agencies in operation of which approximately 200 are members of the main associations. Manning agencies here are subject to much criticism with allegations about illegal practices and breaches of ILO and IMO Conventions, such as extracting fees from seafarers.

Another disturbing practice was that of “watchlisting” and “blacklisting”. Manning agencies complain to the POEA about certain seafarers who are then put on a watchlist and invited to respond to the complaint. The process of arbitration may take several years to decide and in the meantime the seafarer cannot gain employment at sea. Furthermore, the manning agencies are careful to circulate the watchlist to prevent employment of these seafarers. If, following the arbitration, the seafarer is found guilty, he is blacklisted for two years. If found innocent, no compensation is paid. This process often leads to acceptance of poor conditions of employment for fear of being named on a watchlist. Exclusion could take place for offences such as contacting union officials to complain about unfair treatment. In the Philippines some seafarers claimed that the local unions were not meeting their needs. Particular concern was voiced at the unions’ refusal to represent the interests of blacklisted seafarers after six months’ unemployment, as they had been unable to continue to pay their union dues.<sup>9</sup>

In India, manning agencies are used by foreign shipowners to employ Indian seafarers on foreign-flagged vessels. Certain agents are members of regulated associations, Maritime Association of Shipowners, Ship Managers and Agents (MASSA) and Foreign Owners Ship Management Association (FOSMA) with which unions have a strong relationship and negotiate acceptable terms and conditions of employment. There are however many other agents who remain outside such agreements and are currently not regulated by the Government. A seafarer employed by such an agent can expect less agreeable terms and conditions of employment. This issue is of much concern to the ratings’ unions and indeed

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

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the Indian Government. Consequently, following ratification of ILO Convention No. 179, new legislation has been drafted to provide the necessary regulation, and with it some protection for seafarers employed by them on foreign-flagged vessels.

### **3.2. The determination of conditions of employment**

The survey highlighted the difficulty through legislation to protect national seafarers in a foreign jurisdiction. Because of this deficiency, collective bargaining agreements, along with contracts of employment, become an essential process in the employment relationship of seafarers. Typically, the vast majority were covered by collective bargaining agreements or contracts of employment.

From information gained in the case study, it was clear that the standard contract played a vital role in determining employment conditions for the Filipino worker. Under the labour laws in the Philippines, their overseas seafarers are generally considered to be contractual employees and deemed not to have the same rights as regular employees in terms of security of tenure, minimum social security benefits and other rights as prescribed by the Labour Code. Thus the contract between the employer and employee is very important in determining the terms and conditions of employment. The POEA issues and prescribes a standard employment contract (SEC) which contains the minimum terms and conditions of employment, but does not prevent employer and employee from agreeing to improved terms and conditions.

Collective agreements between the unions and employers or their organizations also play an important part in determining terms and conditions. Given this fact it was surprising to discover that Filipino seafarers are the least organized of any Filipino workers, with only 17 per cent belonging to a labour union or association. However, the typical Filipino seafarer will or could in fact be a member of a number of unions, depending on which flag he or she is sailing under the Foreign Owners' Ship Management Association to benefit from collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) negotiated in the appropriate flag State.

In India the level of unionization is much higher, with strong union representation influencing the terms and conditions on Indian-flagged vessels through the National Maritime Board. The ratings achieve superior terms and conditions of employment on Indian-flagged vessels as determined by the Board and enjoy effective continuity of employment through a roster system. Consequently, a minority sail on the foreign-flagged vessels where International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), agreements are usually enforced. There is likely to be an increasing supply to such foreign-flagged vessels whilst unemployment of seafarers in India continues.

Indian officers on the other hand are influenced by the higher wage rates offered by the foreign registers and beneficial tax provisions. This has the obvious potential to create a shortage of quality officers on the Indian flag. Shipowners and unions have already expressed their increasing concerns on this matter to the Government and legislation is being drafted to afford tax benefits to Indian seafarers sailing on Indian-flagged vessels.

In China, terms and conditions for their seafarers working on foreign-flagged vessels are arranged through agreement with unions and various shipowners' associations but the detail is contained in contractual agreements between the company and the seafarer. The whole process is overseen by the China Coordination Council for Overseas Seamen Employment (COSE).

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### 3.3. Competition in the labour market

The long-term trends of employment in the industry have, as has been argued, demonstrated a continuing movement towards the utilization of crews from labour-supplying countries. Recently there is evidence of heightened competition between these countries with regard to seafarers' employment opportunities. One authority argues that "China will become one of the top suppliers of seamen to the world fleet which is in agreement with many studies, and a potential alternative to Filipinos as a major supplier of seafarers".<sup>10</sup>

Taking this argument further, a recent survey conducted by two manning groups from the Philippines, the Filipino Association for Mariners' Employment (FAME) and the Philippine Association of Manning Agents and Ship Managers (PAMAS), showed that 80 of their member agencies lost around 8,300 jobs to other Asian, Eastern European and Chinese competitors over the last two years. They estimate that 50 per cent were lost to other Asian crews, 27 per cent to Eastern European and 14 per cent to China. Owners are finding that the quality is comparable and the wage levels are considerably lower. A comparison of wage scales between Filipino and Chinese seafarers showed that the lowest scale for Filipinos is higher than its closest competitors' highest scale.

Clearly it is essential for the Philippines to confront this issue if they are to remain the major supplier of maritime labour. To this end the shipowning and manning associations have established the Philippines Seafarers' Promotion Council (PSPC). They have identified key areas, which they consider require urgent attention: human resource development, business processes and systems improvement, financial sustainability and stakeholder satisfaction. The PSPC is determined to engage in serious marketing of the Filipino seafarer and promotion of seafaring as a career. It is also committed to ensuring the highest standards of maritime training and education. The primary goal however is to rationalize the complex bureaucracy in the creation of a "one-stop" processing and documentation centre for seafarers' deployment. This will dramatically reduce delays and the scope for corruption that have proved so troublesome for employers and employees. Finally the PSPC plans to rationalize wages by the creation of an Asian seafarers' union which will define and set uniform wages. This will ensure that the Filipinos remain competitive in comparison with other Asian countries, in particular China. The impact of such measures will take time to consolidate. However there are potential dangers ahead. The loss of competitive edge combined with the oversupply of seafarers particularly at the ratings level is creating a situation where the Filipino seafarer is becoming increasingly vulnerable to exploitation.

The Ministry of Communications in China however does not consider Chinese seafarers to be a potentially significant source of international seafaring labour. The vast majority of seafarers they train are required to crew the substantial Chinese fleet. Having said that, an increasing number of Chinese seafarers are developing a preference for working on foreign-owned vessels, the primary reason being because of the more advantageous wage levels (often 50 per cent higher) which are free of tax. The employment of these overseas workers is supervised by the China Coordination Council for Overseas Seamen Employment (COSE) established in 1989 with the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC). This is a branch of the China International Contractors' Association (CHINCA). They are responsible for the annual deployment of 40,000 seafarers to 54 companies based in Taiwan (China), Hong Kong (China), Singapore, Norway, Greece, Republic of Korea, Japan and North America

<sup>10</sup> Li, K.X.; Wonham, J. (1999): "Who mans the world fleet?": A follow-up to the BIMCO/ISF Manpower Survey, in *Maritime Policy and Management*, 26(3), p. 299.

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approved by the Chinese Government. The majority of these vessels are on open registers. Agreements have been established between shipowners' associations and the unions to develop long-term cooperation in the case of Japan, Singapore and Norway.

COSE is responsible for the coordination, guidance and consultation function and assists the relevant government institutions in coordinating and monitoring the activity of overseas seafarers employment. The seafarers themselves are employed through the manning agents who receive up to 12.5 per cent of the seafarers' salary for recruitment services.

The major shipping companies in China, namely COSCO and the China Shipping Group are aware of the preference for employment on foreign vessels and note that the higher quality seafarers properly versed in English tend to secure these positions.

### 3.4. Language

Effective communication on board is paramount to ensure safety of the vessels and the seafarers on it. Since the language of international seafaring is English, fluency in this language is seen as of extreme importance. In countries such as India and the Philippines such skills are well developed. Indeed, in India it was cited as one of the main reasons for restricting the nationality of the crew. Experimentation with foreign officers proved unsuccessful due in some cases to their limited communication skills.

China, on the other hand, recognizes deficiencies in this area and is taking strong measures to improve such ability. The Ministry of Communications' national committee to oversee the quality of education is currently examining this issue. It requires universities to conduct both specialist English courses and to conduct 20 per cent of other courses in English. They recognize that students have the skills of reading but lack proficiency in oral and aural communication.

The Chinese are committed to improving the standard of English due to the deepening reforms and opening up of China to the rest of the world, requirements of seafarers on foreign-going vessels and education for shore-based employment. The IMO has recently sent in four maritime experts to assess the English training programmes through on-site evaluation. The report is pending, but it is thought that they need to re-address the teaching methods to improve language skills.

### 3.5. Age profile

Contrary to the situation in many of the developed countries, seafaring in many parts of the Asia/Pacific region is very much a young person's occupation, particularly for officers.<sup>11</sup> In India both the shipowners and unions recognize a sharp break in employment between 36 and 40 years of age when many officers go ashore to take up other forms of employment. Because of the high turnover, it is possible to become a master by the age of 29. On average the officers' union, Maritime Union of India (MUI), estimated the senior officer age range to be 40-50 years and the junior officer 25-40 years. The main reasons behind this young "retirement" age are sociological and traditional, based on the importance of extended family commitments. The high earning power in comparison to national wages level during the short sea career enables the officer to accumulate sufficient funds to work ashore on leaving sea service, presumably in a less highly paid position. The

<sup>11</sup> See *United Kingdom Seafarers' Analysis* 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, London Guildhall University.

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situation differs on home trade or coastal shipping where the age profile is much higher with many seafarers continuing to the age of 60 years. This fits the family argument, since such seafarers would not generally spend excessively long periods away from home.

Ratings are thought to have a higher average age, particularly those working on Indian-flagged vessels where the Forward Union of Seafarers of India (FUSI) estimates an age range of 20-60 years. On foreign-flagged vessels however ratings generally retire earlier, at 44, as a result it is suggested of the more arduous working conditions on these vessels.<sup>12</sup> There also appears to be little movement of seafarers between the flags; in other words, there is no evidence of seafarers seeking employment on Indian-flagged vessels on reaching the age of 44 years.

Turning to an examination of the Philippines, a survey by the Scalabrini Migration Centre,<sup>13</sup> estimated that 76 per cent of Filipino seafarers are aged between 25 and 44. There appears to be little opportunity for employment beyond 45 years of age. There are a number of reasons put forward for this phenomenon. Given the huge supply of young recruits, there is a natural preference for younger seafarers in an arduous profession requiring considerable physical effort and subject to extreme weather conditions. Secondly, the younger seafarers are generally cheaper to employ than those with more experience. A major factor according to the Government and unions is the requirement for medical insurance which becomes particularly expensive after the age of 45, thus leading to substantial, if indirect, age discrimination.

Again, social structures were also put forward as another reason behind this trend. The family unit is very important in the Philippines and when the costs of schooling children have been met and less money is required, the seafarers may move ashore to less lucrative employment. There is also the suggestion of a shift from overseas (deep sea) to domestic trade vessels at this time. Whilst this trend is clear for ratings, age is thought to be less of a problem for officers. In this group the potential cost disadvantage is outweighed by qualifications and experience.

This age trend is also significant for Chinese seafarers where the average age of ratings is thought to be 41 years and that of officers 39 years, with few over the age of 50 years. Furthermore, the average seafarer is at sea for only five to eight years. After this time, the shore-based jobs become a more attractive proposition.

<sup>12</sup> Opinion of ratings' unions.

<sup>13</sup> "The need for an International Seafarers' Centre in Manila", Scalabrini Migration Centre, July 2000.

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## 4. Conclusion

National and especially international seaborne trade benefits all countries participating in it, a truism heightened in the case of countries in the Asian/Pacific region with their increasing maritime aspirations. This work had the specific purpose of comparing the general responses to a wide-ranging survey of countries in the region with those of the remaining responding countries. The analysis contains a constellation of responses but the conclusion to many of these was that the region is comparable to others in their level of regulation and strategic policies. But the overall intractable problem remains of how effectively such regulations are enforced in the maritime workplace.

Both the case studies and the survey highlighted certain specific issues for the region. The region is comparable with other flag States in terms of inspection, collective bargaining agreements, regulation of working hours and recruitment. It fares significantly better on the incidence of statutory minimum wage, sanctions on shipowners for non-compliance with standards of living and working conditions, and specific seafarer legislation. The areas of concern, however, are lower minimum age for going to sea, wage differentials between nationals and non-nationals, social security provision and repatriation responsibility.

In terms of quality, the level of education and training is improving, with many governments showing a serious commitment to investment in maritime education. This has also led to an increasing number of officers supplied by the region. Unlike many traditional maritime nations, the workforce is a young one, with very few favouring a long sea career. Considering the substantial investment in training, this is an area which must be addressed. A problem for certain countries in the region is the level of English spoken which is perceived as a disadvantage in any seafaring career. China for example recognizes this an issue for their industry and is adopting strong measures to improve the proficiency in the language.

It has been argued that one of the core issues within the region is that of the seafaring labour supply and the extent to which regulation of working and living conditions impacts on this. This raises two interlocking questions. Firstly, what influence do these policies have on the general labour supply position? Secondly, how will individual governments within the region act to maintain or increase their share of the labour supply in an increasingly competitive market? Such questions serve to emphasize that the whole of the present comparative analysis must be seen against the wide diversity in seafarers' living and working conditions in an industry undergoing substantial dynamic change.

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## Appendix

### Asia/Pacific respondents to the questionnaire

State	Source
Australia	Ministry Union
India	Ministry of Labour
Japan	Government Union
Republic of Korea	Union
Malaysia	Ministry of Human Resources
Pakistan	Ministry of Labour Union
Papua New Guinea	Department of Labour and Employment
Philippines	Maritime Industry Authority, POEA, Maritime Training Council
Singapore	Ministry
Vanuatu <sup>14</sup>	Maritime services

<sup>14</sup> Vanuatu is a non-ILO member State.